

What is a *developmental disability*?

Developmental disability is a broad term that applies to a permanent disability that impacts a person's intellectual or physical functioning. The disability is identified sometime before young adulthood. Sometimes developmental disabilities are visible, but oftentimes they are not. No two people with developmental disabilities are alike, as the severity and type of disability is different with each person. Examples of developmental disabilities include cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, and spina bifida, as well as intellectual disabilities, hearing loss, and visual impairment.

While some with developmental

disabilities are fully

independent and require no formal support services, others have disabilities that affect communication, movement or cognition, making formal supports necessary. Access to these support services is important if people with all types of developmental disabilities are to be fully included and able to participate in their communities.

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How does the federal government and Arizona define developmental disability?

Understanding how the federal and Arizona state government define developmental disability is important in identifying available programs and resources. However, government programs and services often have additional eligibility requirements.

Federal law defines a *development disability* as a mental or physical limitation that:

1. Occurs before the person is 22 years old,
2. is expected to last a lifetime, and
3. limits the person's activities in at least three of the following areas:

- ability to care for oneself;
- ability to comprehend or communicate;
- ability to learn;
- ability to move;
- ability to makes independent choices;
- ability to live independently; or
- ability to financially provide for him/herself.¹

Arizona's definition of a *developmental disability* is similar to the federal definition, with the following exceptions:

1. Only those with cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism or a cognitive disability are covered by Arizona's law. Federal law includes other diagnosed disabilities.
2. A developmental disability must manifest itself before the person turns 18 according to Arizona's law; federal law extends the time period to 22 years old.²
3. Children under the age of 6 with significant developmental delays may be defined as having a developmental disability.

By falling under Arizona's definition of developmental disabilities, a person may, in turn, qualify for state developmental disability services.

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¹ From the *Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000* (P.L. 106-402)

² From *Arizona Revised Statutes* (A.R.S. 36-551)